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A FREE CATHOLIC CHURCH

J.M.LLOYD THOMAS

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" A mightier Church shall rise whose covenant word
Shall be the deeds of love. Not *Credo* then—
Amo shall be the password through its gates.
Man shall not ask his brother any more,
'Believest thou?' but, 'Lovest thou?' and all
Shall answer at God's altar, 'Lord, I love.'
For Hope may anchor, Faith may steer, but Love,
Great Love alone, is captain of the soul."

°
**A FREE CATHOLIC
CHURCH**

BY

J. M. LLOYD THOMAS

**BOSTON
AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION
1907**

JAN 14 1908

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A FREE CATHOLIC CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

IT is clear that in our own day Religious Thought is undergoing swift and momentous changes. If these changes are to be firmly seized to the enduring gain of religion and to be prevented from working that moral waste which we are taught is the essence of tragedy, ecclesiastical bodies must abandon the treacherous dogmatic principle on which they are now organised and seek another and firmer foundation. Dr Harald Höffding, in his *Philosophy of Religion*,¹ has said that "There is no doubt that we live in an age which must be described as 'critical,' not

¹ English trans., p. 314.

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organising. But this is not an admission that the only forces in operation are disintegrating forces. There is nothing to prevent smaller groups of persons forming round a common tendency of thought and spirit or a common symbol. And such a union is often deeper and freer than one in which traditional authority is the uniting bond." The following pages have been written out of a deep conviction of this truth. An attempt is here made to state a position rather than to defend it by very closely reasoned argument, although some argument is also forthcoming. In the course of this effort there will arise indications of a way out of sectarian controversy. From partisans thoroughly committed to particular denominationalisms the writer can hardly expect to receive sympathetic consideration ; but he hopes that his motives will be respected, at any rate by those who are seekers with him after a more gracious and truthful fellowship than any provided by the dogmatic Churches.

His aim, if he understands his own heart, is

quite unsectarian, and is not so much to *make* converts as to *find* them, and in some instances, if it may be, to discover them to themselves.

In a Free Catholic Church it is believed will ultimately be found an Ideal which, if courageously worked out, will transcend or reconcile the oppositions not merely of Anglicanism and Dissent, but of Romanism and Protestantism. These chapters closely preserve their original form of popular addresses, with some modifications of substance, and are to be taken more as the expression of an earnest longing for a really Catholic and comprehensive Church than as a systematic presentation of its design. The best sustained argument favouring in the main, but not in detail, the views here set forth is to be found in Sabatier's death-bed legacy to the world — *Religions of Authority and the Religion of the Spirit*. But with this, no less than with Harnack's popular works, should be read the Abbé Loisy's bold and effective criticism in *The Gospel and the Church*.

Writing as a Roman Catholic layman, Mr

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W. J. Williams, in his *Newman, Pascal, Loisy, and the Catholic Church*, has given expression to much that the present writer can cordially endorse.

It may also be permissible to refer to Father Tyrrell's *Much-abused Letter*, which opportunely gives us a revealing glimpse into the nobler mind of Romanism. To read this remarkable epistle is, in more senses than one, a liberal education. It must, however, be studied carefully in the context of such reservations and explanations as are now offered by the writer of it in his own authorised publication.

In the light of these recent contributions to the religious problem, it would hardly be astonishing if the men who will really organise the Free Catholic Church should turn out to be, not the advanced theologians of the Protestant School, but the more daring Liberals of the Roman Communion, precipitated to decisive and independent action by some such crisis as we now see going on in France. These would, at any rate, have the incalculable advantage of being able to

bring to the modern movement not only a peculiar appreciation of what is essentially venerable in antiquity and a cultivated perception and taste in matters of ecclesiastical art, ritual, and symbolism, but also, what is far more valuable, that living concrete sense of the historical continuity of the Church without which every reformation is doomed to failure. The sense of continuity need not, however, be incompatible with perfect intellectual honesty and moral integrity; nor is a frank withdrawal from official connection with traditional churches a breach of the principle of development. Such withdrawal may be the only possible expression, at a higher level of religious conviction, of this very principle itself—a consistent application of the Church's instinct for self-preservation working through original minds and forbidding the traditions of men to make void the word of God.

What Liberals of the Roman and Anglican Churches seem to lack, no less than advanced Dissenters who complacently disregard the doctrinal trust-deeds on which their chapels

are held, is a constraining conviction that Truth now calls upon them to come out of their creed- and confession-bound churches to initiate the New Reformation on the broad field of our Common Christendom.

If Protestants need some Abbé Loisy or Fogazzaro to carry over to them the atmosphere and some of the human symbolism of Catholic piety, the Liberal Catholics need, even more, some Martineau or Mrs Humphry Ward to give to that piety its corrective and purgation in an austerer ethic of veracity.

The old Reformation, in so far as it implied the authority of the Scriptures, is a spent force. In the words of the late Professor William Wallace, it "did not answer the questions it raised, and it imported a new bitterness into all attempts to answer them. At any rate, what happened was that the documentary evidence of Scripture came to be looked upon as all-important. *The historical record took the place of the Church. The title-deed became more important than the estate.*"¹

Now that the higher criticism has thrown

¹ *Lectures and Essays*, p. 68.

new light on that title-deed, we do not indeed lose sight of its spiritual meaning, but we attach ever-diminishing importance to its letter, and we appraise with an ever-increasing estimate of value the significance of the estate. Yet, even so, there can be no going back, "we cannot live on residues, neither can we live on substitutes, we must have equivalents." There are those so profoundly impressed by considerations like these that they tell us that Protestantism is an exhausted power and that English Dissent is dead at its roots. The branches may for a few years flourish above ground and make a brave show of life, but only at last to dry away for lack of vital sap. But many Liberal Catholics are said to be whispering anxiously together and prophesying the same fate to the Roman Church. Perhaps they are both right and both wrong. It may be that, instead of either being destroyed, both will be fulfilled in a Free Catholic Church. Such, at all events, is the conviction of the writer of these addresses, and he rejoices to know that many share with him this larger and more cheerful outlook.

Deus est interior intimo meo et superior summo meo.

AUGUSTINE.

It is the essence and beginning of religion to feel that all our belief and speech respecting God is untrue, yet infinitely truer than any non-belief and silence.

JAMES MARTINEAU.

Nothing spiritual, nothing holy, nothing belonging to the highest order of truth and beauty admits of being defined, and by the very attempt loses its character at once and becomes something else ; and as for the consciousness of God within the soul, the understanding can no more comprehend it than the tree can tear itself up and look into its own roots.

JAMES MARTINEAU.

CHAPTER I

THE CATHOLICITY OF RELIGION

RELIGION by its very nature is too profound a reality to admit of being defined. As a spirit and an attitude toward the Universe of Being, it escapes the logical precision of words. It includes so much that is formless and vague that it cannot be materialised into tangible propositions. We may speak of it as a pervasive atmosphere, a mystical haze that transforms and glorifies the ordinary features of our life. It is elusive as the beauty of a picture, the emotion of music, the breath of poetry, and subtle as the element of distinction in character. It is a totality, a whole wherever it is, so that we cannot say it is exclusively this or that. It is an enveloping loveliness and fragrance of life, a quality of

will, a transfiguring mood, an aspiring consciousness, a prayer for perfection, a communion of spirit, a state of being in which the mind is attuned to the Eternal and the Infinite. We may speak of it thus, and in a thousand varying phrases, but it remains at the last indescribable and unanalysable as the "far-folded mists and gleaming halls of morn." To define is not only to distinguish, but to limit and exclude. When we try to bring our minds to the exact boundaries of religion, we are trying to sail our ship into the receding horizon, or voyage our balloon to touch the unattainable blue of the sky. For religion is that higher experience of the universal human soul of which the particular instance is but

"an arch wherethro'
Gleams that untravell'd world, whose margin fades
For ever and for ever when I move."

The moment one begins to define and exclude in matters of religion, he is engaged upon an invidious and impossible task. You draw your circle, giving it a broad and splendid

sweep in order that it may include all that is worthy and noble in the universe of your mind. "That is religion," you say, and you thereby further imply, "Outside of that there is no true religion." But presently you are confronted with a type of manhood which is obviously and greatly religious. You would like to have such a man at your side as an inspiration and support, and it is intolerable to feel that instead of being your comrade and ally, he must be shut out from the sympathy of your religion. And yet, by the terms of your definition, large and magnanimous as they seemed to be, you have virtually excommunicated him. He is not within the meaning of your creed, and yet you know that it is an affront to the Catholicity of your faith to regard him as outside its pale.

Recognising your mistake, you proceed to correct and expand your definition, and there-upon someone who is manifestly within the letter of your new creed is now an offence to your spirit. He can repeat the patter of

your dogma, but he does not represent that holy temper of life which you associate with your religion. Yet inasmuch as he fits in perfectly with your definition, you have now to accept him as a type and representative of your faith.

Many a Christian would like to restrict his conception of Religion to Christianity ; but the term "Christian" is a word of a hundred meanings, uttered by a hundred conflicting denominations. Let him then widen its application so as to include all avowed followers of Christ. But he now thinks of religious men outside the company of professing Christians ; prayerful, holy men, many of them having the mind of Christ, yet not calling themselves after his name. To exclude such from the sphere of essential religion is to do a thing which Christ himself would never have sanctioned.

"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven ; but he that doeth the will of my

Father which is in heaven.”¹ “Behold my mother and my brethren ! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother.”²

And we remember that dramatic incident recorded in Luke³ of the adoring enthusiasm of a certain woman out of the multitude who lifted up her voice and said to him : “Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the breasts which thou didst suck. But he said, Nay, rather blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it.”

And this word of God is very nigh unto men, even in their hearts. To use the name of Jesus as a name of exclusiveness is to degrade Christianity into a denomination, to sink it into a sect. Thereby we grieve the spirit of our Master, crucify our Lord again, and rend once more the seamless robe of Christ.

¹ Matt. vii. 21.

² Matt. xii. 49, 50.

³ xi. 27, 28. Corrected trans.

But it may be urged that religion, even at its broadest, is a spirit that can only be enjoyed by those who "believe in God." But it is well to remind ourselves here of the words of Luther: "A god is that whereat a man can provide himself with all good and find a refuge in all need; to have a god, therefore, is nothing else but to believe in him and trust him from the heart. As I have often said, it is nothing but the trust and faith of the heart which makes god, whether true or false. When faith and trust are right, then is thy god right, and contrariwise, when trust is false and wrong, then the right god is not."¹

To say, then, that religion is the possession of those who "believe in God" does not, even from the orthodox Protestant point of view, help us, but rather leads us astray. Again, the word God in ordinary language stands for an infinite and eternal reality, and

¹ *Catechismus major*. Quoted from Dr Höffding's *Phil. of Rel.*, p. 125, English trans.

is therefore too vast to be used in any narrow and exclusive sense.

Moreover, there are to be found in the world religions which are not in the strict sense theistic. The study of comparative religion furnishes more than one example, but Buddhism is the classical instance. No one with even a slight acquaintance with Eastern thought can fail to acknowledge that the life of Gotama and of many of his disciples is a life wondrously pure and spiritual—a life, moreover, to which Christ himself, we cannot but think, would have applied the words: “He who is not against us is for us.”

It is, however, not necessary to go so far afield, for modern English culture will provide familiar types in men in other respects so diverse as Matthew Arnold, Clough, Richard Jefferies, and George Meredith. As the hart desireth the water-brooks, so panted the spirit of Jefferies for that rain of deep feeling which came to him from communion with earth and sea and sky. In a

measure, we all share his emotionally pantheistic attitude. The grass, the trees, the clouds, the very soil which he crumbled between his fingers were to him a brotherhood, a religious community that spoke authentic tidings to his soul. His cosmic emotion attained to genuine ecstasy. He prayed in his own way, with the whole fierce ardour of his being, that the beauty and virtue and vitality of the natural world might pass their secret to his spirit, that he might take some of the colour and odour and joy of their life into his own. In an intense rapture of emotion he prayed that he might take from all their energy, grandeur, and beauty, and gather it into himself, that he might "touch to the unutterable existence infinitely higher than deity."¹

Poets like Shelley, and others who have been named, express a spirit of revolt in the interests of a nobler faith. They reject the popular religion not because they believe in something poorer than ordinary theism, but

¹ *The Story of My Heart.*

precisely because they reach eagerly after a higher religion, because they aspire after a more august and awful reality—that “unutterable existence infinitely higher than deity.” *Alte dubitat qui altius credit.*

It is regrettable that Christians are not more ready to admit with T. H. Green that “the enemy which religion, *i.e.* a God-seeking morality, has to fear, is not a passionate atheism. Such atheism is often a religion which misunderstands itself. It is seeking after God, but in the hurry of irritation against the ignorance and fear which call themselves religious, it cannot recognise its object under the old name. It may limit and distort the spiritual life, and yet leave the spring of its nobility untouched. Not from it is our danger, but from the slow sap of an undermining indifference which does not deny God and duty, but ignores them, which does not care to trouble itself about them, and finds in our acknowledged inability to know them, as we know matters of fact, a new excuse for putting them aside.

It is this which takes off the native beauty from the fair forehead of a childlike faith, and leaves, not the scars of a much-questioning and often-failing but still believing search after God, whom so to seek is to find, but the vacancy of contented worldliness, or the sneer of the baffled pleasure-seeker.”¹

There is, in truth, a hard and niggardly belief as there is a sublime and affluent unbelief. There is an agnosticism which is essentially spiritual and high-minded as there is a dogmatism that is commonplace and petty. Just as there is a Quaker silence which is a positive and not a negative thing, being too full of eloquence to submit to the obscurity of words, so there is a not un-Christian agnosticism which is too full of faith and spirituality to tolerate so mean a thing as a theological dogma.

“If I am asked,” said the late Henry Sidgwick, “whether I believe in a God, I should really have to say I do not know,

¹ *Works*, iii. pp. 270, 271.

that is, I do not know whether I *believe* or *merely hope* that there is a moral order in the universe that we know, a supreme principle of Wisdom and Benevolence guiding all things to good ends, and to the happiness of the good. I certainly *hope* that this is so, but I do not think it capable of being *proved*. All I can say is that no opposed explanation of the origin of the cosmos . . . seems to me even plausible, and that I cannot accept life on any other terms, or construct a rational system of my own conduct except on the basis of this faith. . . . Duty is to me as real a thing as the physical world, though it is not apprehended in the same way ; but all my apparent knowledge of duty falls into chaos if my belief in the moral government of the world is conceived to be withdrawn. Well, I cannot resign myself to disbelief in duty ; in fact if I did, I should feel that the last barrier between me and complete philosophical scepticism, or disbelief in truth altogether, was broken down. Therefore I sometimes say to myself ‘I believe in God,’ while some-

times, again, I can say no more than I *hope* this belief is true, and I must and will act as if it was.”¹

It may be conjectured that many professing Christians, if equally candid with themselves, would answer in much the same spirit. But can we say that such an attitude is not nobly and essentially religious? Is it not the fact that in our real Church, the Church of our own soul's deepest affinities, we include the religious agnostic, and fail to find the worldly-minded and paltry believer? The men that our whole being rushes out to greet as comrades in this great campaign of religion are men whose souls passionately apprehend the great values and ideals of life. Here, let us say, is a man who loves his fellowmen, who has risked and suffered for their well-being, who perchance has toiled through blinding agony for their redemption, whose heart is on fire “for truth, for liberty, for religion,” whose soul is enlarged and inflamed within him by the nobler passions of humanity,

¹ *Memoir*, pp. 347, 348.

who is willing to fail strongly and silently, and sink forever, if only over his dead body mankind may march to victory,—Can we think that Christ, who sought an inward religion “in spirit and in truth,” would disown such a man? We may believe somehow in God, and yet not believe greatly in man, and compared with such an agnostic’s human enthusiasm, our belief may be the very caricature and mockery of faith.

“And some not less are his, who vainly sought
His voice, and with his silence have been taught;
Who bare his chain that bade them to be bound,
And, at the end, in finding not, have found.”

Religion, then, it would appear, is a reality which cannot be enclosed within hedges or ringed round with a fence. It is an exaltation of purity, an enthusiasm of goodness, a spirit of holiness, an ardour for truth, a heightened and impassioned life that passes and penetrates like an atmosphere over and through all barriers of definition. It is not a mere belief about things, but the spirit in which we accept and face them. It is an

attitude, a sensitiveness and receptivity of soul, a transforming and transfiguring energy of mind which selects and seizes the enduring interests of life. It is the heart of reverence and devotion in the presence of the Highest and Holiest. It is "faith in the conservation of values." It is eternal life in the midst of time. It is the sacredness of moral obligation and the solemnity and joy of communion with the Oversoul. It is the great mood, that rapture of imagination whereby we rise above ourselves, and contemplate from a still centre of Eternity—Nature, Man, and Society. Religion must, in order to satisfy the whole man, endeavour to translate itself into doctrine, which is here distinguished from dogma. But it is first of all not even a doctrine, but a climate and temper of the whole spirit which permanently sustains high moral and intellectual efforts, as well as deep, satisfying emotions. It may be said that we are religious when we are possessed by a pure intensity of holy feeling, a white passion of moral earnestness, an austere chastity of intel-

lectual desire. And these can endow even the agnostic with some of the qualifications of a saint. As was said of old, God is spirit, and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.

Men love the old churches, while they shrink from the old doctrines ; in their minds new forms of faith and a new ritual are already travailing, yet, as it seems, "powerless to be born," and they more and more feel the loneliness of Amiel ; "I cannot be in the right all alone"—I cannot live my life without the old aids of Christian prayer and discipline ; yet a force of conviction I cannot disavow forbids me the forms I know. When will the Church to which I belong, and my teachers belong, rise into being ?

MRS HUMPHRY WARD.

Though for the present we are obliged—unless we live with the great ones of past ages—to be content to murmur to ourselves the melody which the experience of life awakens in us, we need not therefore relinquish the hope that the old forces will eventually produce new forms.

HARALD HÖFFDING.

CHAPTER II

THE FULFILLING OF CHRISTIANITY

THERE are perhaps not a few minds quite prepared to sympathise with the main position taken up in the foregoing chapter. But of these it is likely that many, have little hope of seeing such an attitude cordially recognised by the Christian Church at large. Current religion seems to them too thoroughly identified with ecclesiasticism and too deeply committed to incredible dogmas ever to be satisfactorily reformed. They feel, though not without some sadness of regret, that they must abandon it to its fate. Called upon to engage manfully in a new reformation, they turn away sorrowful, saying : " That Quest is not for me." They

may respond æsthetically to much that is beautiful in what has become for them the Christian mythology. They may love its historic cathedrals as they love ancient romance and mediæval art. But they cannot in sincerity respond beyond this to its intellectual and religious appeal. Despairing of its future, they see nothing before it but gradual decay and dissolution. Religion to become again a living power in their lives must pass through the upheaval of a revolution, for they see no prospect in any deliberately planned and patient reformation. It is not presumptuous to address these people with another plea and ask them to "consider it again." Can the historic faith re-state and re-present itself to the modern mind as a Religion capable of answering the highest demands and needs of men? Does it contain within itself elements of indestructible vitality which may still quicken the best conscience of the race and provide a noble fellowship for souls?

In trying to answer such questions one can

easily give an impression of "apologetic" insincerity. Confronted by hide-bound traditionalism, one would naturally endeavour to show that the past is not everything, that the emerging spirit of to-day must discover its own fresh and appropriate forms. This was certainly what the Founder of Christianity taught when he spoke of putting new wine into new wine-skins. But there is such a thing as a provincialism of time as well as of space, and if one were faced not by traditionalists and obscurantists, but by "advanced" men who made light of the accumulated wisdom gathered from age-long experience or who worshipped with idolatrous excess every phase of modernity, then he might, without abandoning his claim to consistency, attempt to bring out the abiding value of the past and show how a new message comes not to destroy, but to fulfil. And in this also he would have the authority and example of the same Master.

For Christ did not make a complete breach with Judaism. He recognised that every

jot and tittle of good in it had to be carried up into the new organism of faith to contribute to the freer and larger growth of the kingdom.

The general acceptance of the doctrine of evolution has made it easy for us moderns to grasp the principle of a progressive and developing life, and to see the fulfilment of the old in the new. Indeed, it may be feared that contemporary thought is too powerfully obsessed by biological conceptions. But they are at least useful as images and metaphors of what takes place in every great historical movement. It does not really destroy, it fulfils ; or if it destroys at all, it destroys by fulfilling. The Christian Faith proceeded out of Judaism like a new variation and fresh outcrop of life. Rooted as it was in the past, it had to push forward and claim the future as its own. It had to sustain its life by the transformation of its surroundings as a tree must sustain its life by absorbing and assimilating from the soil and from the atmosphere what strengthens and nourishes its growth. Christ seems to have

foreseen that the movement initiated by him was destined to a world-wide development. Protestants may say that he never contemplated "a Church." It may suffice to retort that he never contemplated a New Testament. But he undoubtedly foresaw a future for the kingdom for which he lived and died. It was like a mustard seed—that is, a principle of immeasurable expansion. It was like leaven—that is, an immanent, diffusive, all-pervading life working mysteriously within human society until it completely transformed the whole. That prophecy is ever being fulfilled. In conquering contemporary civilisation Christianity took up some of the elements of surrounding Paganism. It assimilated and made its own much of the surviving Greek and Roman philosophy. Indeed, it has been seriously urged that it was the Church that made the doctrines of Plato known to the world at large. A similar claim might be more justly made for the mediæval church when it accepted Aristotelianism as an almost authoritative philosophy.

Forms of worship were markedly borrowed from or influenced by the current ritual and symbolism. Some of this was deliberately, some of it was unconsciously, applied by the young faith to its own purposes. Representations of Orpheus playing his enchanting music while bird and beast gathered round in a hush of rapture were seen to be suggestive of the mission of the new movement. Orpheus, by an easy transition, became Christ taming the hidden savagery in the breast of man. By the beauty of his life and teaching, sweeter than the magic minstrelsy of Orpheus, he was seen to be bringing all creation into holy subjection to the law of Love. He came with the gift of a more abundant life. The charming figure seated under fragrant trees was no longer Orpheus, but the diviner Master of a diviner song than the makers of the Orpheus legend had dreamed.¹ In this way many an olden symbol was re-consecrated and dedicated anew to the Faith. The natural delight of man in plastic and pictorial

¹ Farrar's *Christ in Art*, p. 30.

art asserted itself again and overcame every denial and repression.

It might thus happen that some especially venerated statue of Jupiter would have a halo circled round its head and a key put into its hand to serve as an image of the Christian Apostle. It is said that the well-known figure in St Peter's in Rome is, in fact, such a transformed heathen statue. And possibly many a majestic Juno may have been thus baptised into the mildness of the Mother of Christ. No visitor to Rome can come away without having been impressed by the way in which the old Temples, some of them then occupied by Mithraic altars, were bodily taken over by the Christian Church. Examples could be almost indefinitely multiplied, but these will serve as illustrations of the more obvious and superficial process whereby Paganism was absorbed and transmuted in the new religion. But Christianity went far deeper than this. It seized upon the prevailing morals of the time. It blew like a cleansing gale and burnt like a purify-

ing fire through the lusts and passions of men. Not only did it set before the ancient world a commanding Ideal of Life, but in the conduct and character of its members it exhibited in a concrete way what it really meant by that Ideal. It did more than deepen and intensify devotion to the Highest, it gave the very idea of the Highest a holier meaning, and put into it, as it were, a new filling and content. The great ideals of the True, the Good, and the Beautiful may become for men mere abstractions which they attempt in vain to galvanise into life by the use of capital letters. Their value and validity even as Ideals depend at last on the meaning and significance we put into them and get out of them. Christianity did more than provide a thirsty world with new wine-skins: it gave it in rich abundance a new vintage. What the Founder did for Judaism the Faith did for Paganism. And this function Christianity must still perform by inspiration, by precept, by example. Not by compulsory and punitive powers after the fashion of the

State, but by convincing appeal and contagion of life will it captivate and enstructure itself in our modern civilisation. Day by day in life and in conduct, members of the Church, laymen no less than ministers, are creating again the body and blood of Christ—that is to say, providing the material of a Christian morality, forming the new increment of the substance of the Christian Life. Every moral judgment, every act of mercy, every sentence of justice, builds up the coral structure of a christianised society out of the sea of Life. Moral gain, however, is rarely unaccompanied by loss. A great crusade cannot come forth from its warfare without dust and wounds. It was thus with Christianity. The older morals and institutions soiled its purity. Much that it endeavoured to assimilate tainted its life. To ignore the existence of these evil accretions, as some expositors of the theory of development do, is to endorse every blunder and authorise every crime committed in the name of Christ. But when every corruption which a sober

historian can detect is fully acknowledged, it is still true that the Faith was never completely swamped or submerged in the morass through which it had often to make its progress. It even survived being made the Imperial religion ; it preserved, so to speak, its own individuality, and itself perpetuated through literary record and tradition the very witnesses which rose and will again rise in judgment against it. Thus it is that it comes to us to-day bearing in its bosom its own unsterilised vitality and essential characteristics. Through all change it has persisted and grown. Whatever the soil, whatever the climate, an acorn, if it grows at all, grows always and everywhere into an oak and never into an elm or a beech. But its development as an oak may be stunted and imperfect, and may leave us with many regrets over the fair and goodly proportions that "might have been." The business of live men, however, is rather with what is and may be than with what might have been. And without pressing a mere analogy too

far, it may be said that in a deep sense Christianity continued, spite of all errors and impurities, to be Christianity. Not indeed *primitive* Christianity any more than the tree is the sapling or the sapling the seed. Through difference and modification it preserved a certain identity, as the man is the same yet not the same as the child. Never fixed and immutable, because organic and alive, it has gone on evolving through the centuries. Nor can this growth be permitted to end in a static and infallible Church, for the end of growth is the beginning of death. If it is to live on earth at all, it can only live by ever reforming itself, ever sloughing off the old and putting on the new. How marvellously complex, how prolific and fecund that life is, may be observed when we contemplate its ramifications through the thousand creeds and churches. It is still, after all criticism has done its legitimate work, the prevailing moral spirit of our Western world. Even when men deny it, yet unconsciously or consciously it is in it

they live and move and have their being. When they reject and repudiate it with vehemence, it is the unacknowledged source of the very passion which they direct against its life. They cannot escape it, for on its breasts their own souls have been nourished. In a word, it is the air in which they fly, the sea in which they swim.

This Christian Religion, like every profound religion, will not submit to definition. It is at once too subtle, too actual, too concrete to be analysed ; like life itself, it can only be successfully examined as alive. To dissect here is to murder, and no effort can avail to extract completely the "essence of Christianity" from its outward forms and activities. In a passage not too well known for quotation, Amiel has said that, "What we call Christianity is a vast ocean into which flow a number of spiritual currents of distant and various origin ; certain religions, that is to say, of Asia and of Europe, the great ideas of Greek wisdom and especially of Platonism. Neither its doctrine nor its morality, as they have been histori-

cally developed, are new and spontaneous. What is essential and original in it is the practical demonstration that the human and the divine nature may co-exist, may become fused into one sublime flame ; that holiness and pity, justice and mercy may meet together and become one in man and in God. What is specific in Christianity is Jesus—the religious consciousness of Jesus.” This view may be supplemented by the argument of Abbé Loisy, that “We know Christ only by the tradition, across the tradition, and in the tradition of primitive Christians. This is as much as to say that Christ is inseparable from his work, and that the attempt to define the essence of Christianity . . . apart from tradition cannot succeed.”

Historical critics of Christianity may be divided into two main schools,—those who in their search for analogies give us the symbol of the kernel and the husk, and those who give instead that of the bulb and its leaves. Yet it was the Protestant Harnack and not Loisy, his Roman Catholic critic, who first

warned us not to be "like the child who, wanting to get at the kernel of a bulb, went on picking off the leaves until there was nothing left, and then could not help seeing that it was just the leaves that made the bulb."

But if there is anything specific in Christianity at all, we must acknowledge, as Harnack would be the first to insist, that it is a religion which must also be symbolised by kernel and husk. The accretions of error and superstition, whether they belong to the past or to the present, must be cracked and broken through if we are to appropriate and enjoy the richer sustenance of the faith. The liberal and progressive Christian will therefore accept both symbols. If in a blind passion of revolt we lay too rude a hand on its existing forms and proceed to strip it of all its integuments, we shall be forced at last to confess with Peer Gynt :

"There seem a terrible lot of flakes,
To get to the core what a time it takes !
Yes, grammarcy, it does, one divides and divides,
And there is no kernel : it's all outsides."

On the other hand, if there is in Christianity no reforming or purifying principle, no manner of norm whereby we can distinguish and select between competing claims, we are left with the futile and otiose conclusion that everything that passes for Christian is equally valuable or equally worthless. The freer faith will be moderate enough to keep the balance between these two alternative principles. It will not overlook the warning of the parable of the bulb and the leaves by laying exclusive stress on the other parable of the kernel and the husk. For there is no Christianity, no historic religion at all, in fact, without some forms, symbols, customs, ordinances, institutions. One might go farther and say that for us there is no God in complete isolation from Nature, Man, and Society. He, too, has a woven garment of externality, and must be conceived as an immanent spirit who lives, moves, and has his being in and through the Universe and the mind of man.

Christianity, then, must express its inward

life in and through outward life, in and through the thought and conduct and institutions of a Christian people. This being so, it is an act of reason to accept this religion as a fact in being—or, shall it be said, in becoming?—and to endeavour to make the Church of the New Reformation come like its Master, not to destroy but to fulfil. Is it not possible, without false accommodation or evil compromise, to be tolerant and magnanimous enough to recognise that there is much in the life of the older churches, Roman and Protestant, which must be taken up and assimilated in the religion of the future? Is it not possible for earnest men to be not less but more Catholic than the old Catholicism, not less but more thorough and independent in the use of freedom than the old Protestantism? The Roman Catholic is undoubtedly right in insisting on the continuous and abiding life of the Church. He is wrong when he regards that life as immutable and inflexible, or modifiable only under control of ecclesiastical infallibility. The Protestant is right

in so far as his reason and conscience respond to the "inward light." He is wrong when he thinks that his response to this light is not conditioned by the life and experience which he has inherited, and still more deeply and darkly wrong when he substitutes an infallible book for an infallible Church. Christianity must be accepted, if at all, not merely as an individual and scriptural, but also, and more especially, as a social and spiritual religion. It must still express itself in and through a community, a brotherhood. In emphasising the continuity and solidarity of the faith, it will have not a narrower but a wider and steadier vision than Romanism, and will take from the old Church the spirit of a reasonable and moral obedience to the corporate life. It will rise to the thought of the incarnation of God in Universal Humanity, and grasp the reality of a Holy Catholic Church in its freedom, inclusiveness, and true authority. How this may be we shall now attempt to indicate.

There is springing up in many devout minds the conviction that the principle of Christian fellowship cannot be an intellectual one, that that which makes Christians one must be something deeper and more comprehensive than agreement in a long-drawn system of doctrines. Religion is eminently social. It is essentially the deepest bond of union between man and man. Whatever that be which makes a man a Christian, it should unite him to all Christians, to all good and religious men.

JOHN CAIRD.

Faith is not a sharing in the common creed of the visible Church, but in the common vision of the invisible Church which is, in a measure, that of God Himself.

GEORGE TYRELL.

CHAPTER III

AN UNDOGMATIC CHURCH

THE work of the religious reformer is obviously a task of supreme difficulty. The ideal which he cherishes may be tolerably clear, but to make it real in practical life will demand no small amount of faith and organising power. To criticise existing ecclesiastical orders in the interests of some fanciful scheme, or of mere negation, is fatally easy. To defend our own particular Church, because it is ours, and apologise for its existing nature in order that we may feel justified in acquiescing in it, and so save ourselves the pains of sacrifice, is no less easy. The object of an ecclesiastical statesman should be to criticise in order to reconstruct, to defend in order to conserve what is per-

manently precious and carry it up to yet higher levels.

Born as inheritors of the common Christian tradition, we should be less than human if we could lightly uproot ourselves from the past. On the other hand, as beings who experience a present communion with the Eternal Spirit, we cannot consent to remain the decrepit pensioners of history.

It has been urged in our first chapter that Religion cannot be confined to a particular church or visible fellowship. But within Religion thus conceived we may yet distinguish, without separating, movements and currents in which we may elect to live and express the catholicity of our faith. Swimmers in deep waters sometimes experience almost sudden changes of temperature, but as they pass in and out of tidal currents, they know they are yet in one sea. Similarly the life of modern Christendom stirs with many movements. It would be difficult to describe these accurately, for not a few of them flow into and out of one another and

mingle their influences. As we have a Gulf Stream, and no one can tell us exactly where it begins and where it ends, for it has no banks like a river, and is one with the main ocean—so in modern Christianity we have a strong movement obvious enough to the educated mind. We can feel ourselves within it, we can feel ourselves outside of it, but we cannot determine its exact boundaries, for in truth it has none. We may call this movement Liberal Christianity, but it is one with a Christianity without epithets, as this, again, is one with Universal Religion.

Men who sympathise more especially with this movement are powerfully persuaded that Christianity is a religion of the spirit, and cannot any longer be presented as a religion of dogmatic authority. Minds thus convinced are daily increasing in number and in influence. It is not too sanguine to say that the future belongs to them. Though they are now to be found scattered about in different churches, and in still greater numbers outside all the churches, they feel attracted by

a common sympathy, and are drawn forward along converging lines to a common goal. It is natural that they should desire to come more intimately together and form themselves into closer corporate union.

One of the most powerful forces acting on these minds is the *imperative* of *veracity*, which is driving many of the nobler minds out of the creed-bound churches, while those who still linger hesitatingly inside are oppressed by an uncomfortable feeling that their position is humiliating and equivocal, if not indeed personally dishonourable. It would carry us far beyond the scope of these papers if we embarked on the Ethics of Creed-Conformity. That there is a painful "case of conscience" is sufficiently evident from the ever-recurring debates on the subject. Again and again the light-hearted acquiescence of the world is startled by some "heresy hunt" or by the secession of some prominent clergyman or layman who can endure the situation no longer. Dr Rashdall, himself a distinguished Broad-Church theologian, is

constrained to admit that "Amid all the controversies by which we are surrounded, the most distressing feature is the appalling indifference to truth which (I regret to say it) seems to be more and more prevalent among large sections of the clergy and their more zealous lay adherents."¹ And with an irony born of sorrow, Martineau wrote: "It is no longer an insult to a clergyman's honour, but rather a compliment to his intelligence, to suspect him of saying one thing and believing another."²

On another occasion the latter said that "This tampering with sincerity not only arrests the advance to higher truth, but eats like a canker into the morals of our time." A religion of veracity which is also a religion of heart-felt devotion is a normal and ultimate desire of the human soul. *But this can only be attained through the unconditional surrender of the dogmatic system of organisation.* A religious fellowship based on union of spirit,

¹ *Christus in Ecclesia*, p. 341.

² *Essays*, vol. ii. p. 501.

not on uniformity of doctrine, visionary as it may seem, is not impossible to earnest self-sacrificing men. Indeed, congregations thus organised already exist among us, and have been sympathetically described by their most distinguished representative.

“ Among the Nonconformists who were unchurched by the Act of Uniformity, not a few learned the lesson of persecution aright, and when permitted to build their own ‘conventicles,’ and constitute their own societies, refused to put the yoke on others which they had been unable to bear themselves, and dedicated their chapels to Christian worship without specification of usage or of creed. Scope being thus left for natural development, their descendants became familiar with successive doctrinal change, and with simultaneous doctrinal variety without interruption of continuous religious life. To them, therefore, it can be no new thing to consign the articles of theology to the realm of *individual* opinion, and to trust, *as societies*, to a purely spiritual bond. They do not, like the Cath-

olic-minded Churchmen, find themselves members of a body and under a constitution far narrower than their own spirit, and obliged to break bounds in order to claim the full measure of Christian fellowship. In the congregations to which they belong, everything is possible which the largest piety can desire, and the latitude of communion, which elsewhere is a dream of the future, foreshadowed by the brave Catholicity of exceptional men, is the legal rule and corporate principle.”¹ The writer, however, proceeds to admit that these Nonconformist communities have not worked out persistently their own historical principle, but have fallen into usages which have arrested the natural growth and limited the spiritual freedom left possible to them at their birth.

Whether their freedom was originally due to the accident of their legal situation, or to the clear apprehension of the Free Catholic ideal, is still disputed among them, and this historical ambiguity is reflected in the in-

¹ Martineau's *Essays*, vol. ii. p. 505.

decision of their ecclesiastical polity at the present day. The truth would appear to be that only a few of the better spirits among them saw the larger vision, and that the others, by good fortune, builded better than they knew. Owing to this mingling of the narrower with the broader ideals, it may be doubted whether these Churches will ultimately be led into the nobler Catholicity of the liberal faith, or whether they will sink down into a hard and un-ideal sectarianism, and so become guilty of a great apostasy. Certainly some of the best minds among them are striving in the face of discouragement, within and without, to save this little Israel from disaster and extinction, and are turning to the "Gentile" world with a frank if uncompromising invitation for sympathy and help.

But whatever may be *their* place in the larger march of the religious movement, a Free Catholic Church is an ideal which we believe destined to be realised.

It will doubtless be objected that in any

organised Church there will be practical, even if there are no theoretical, "limits of comprehension," and that even a Free Catholic Church cannot include all. But this only means that there are persons who will insist on dogmatic limitations, and who will therefore not suffer themselves to be included in an undogmatic church. Similarly adherents of a strict orthodoxy which condemns every theological error as sinful cannot be expected to fraternise cordially with liberal theologians who have thoroughly learnt that the heresy of one age may be the truth and inspiration of the next. It goes without saying that a Free Catholic Church cannot be organised on self-contradictory and mutually destructive principles. If it is inclusive it cannot be also exclusive ; if it is progressive, it cannot be also immutable. It is not in the power of any institution to be at once broad and narrow, open and close, free and creed-bound. These then are its limits—that is to say, not limits at all, or only such as must necessarily arise from the denial of limits. The point

to be pressed is therefore that in a Free Catholic Church the devotional life may be as inclusive and Catholic as the spiritual religion of Christ, who said, "Him that cometh unto me I will in nowise cast out."¹ The "limits of comprehension" are thus not the definite excommunicatory terms of any theological dogma, but the natural human realities of spiritual sympathy and religious affinity. Such a comprehensive Church is the only Church that can really be Catholic without violating the obligation of veracity, for it will recognise once more the Pentecostal reality of a Christianity which every man may hear speaking in his own language.

It will plead that while creeds and confessions divide, spirit and love unite. There are no men so like-minded and unanimous but that in some points they differ. And there are no men so alien and divided but that in the spirit of the Highest they may

¹ Reference may here be made to the nobly impassioned appeal of Dr John Hunter in *The Coming Church*.

discover their essential agreement. Personalities that repel each other in their secular mood may yet become fused in a common life when kindled by the Holy Spirit.

If our life is aglow with religion, we shall make ourselves felt and understood by men of diverse theological tongues. We shall appeal to all ; if we are earnest and imaginative enough, it is conceivable that we may even attract all. Something in our expression of this freer religious life which has quickened us will touch and inspire the hearts of men. Our strangest and most foreign speech will become instinct with the ultimate reality of life, and become intelligible to all. Our best representatives will be endowed with the eloquence which is not of words but of a spirit that carries meaning and conviction for all souls. Our ministry will be in demonstration of the spirit and of power. " Every man heard them speaking in his own language." Only thus can we secure an honest Broad Church for honest men. Not professing a common creed, not subscribing

to a formulated set of doctrines, we shall announce to the world that our fellowship is not one of assent to dogma, but a communion of devotion, of life, of Religion. This Church of the Spirit is indeed the apostolic and truly Catholic Church—the Church of Faith, Hope, Love, *wherein the greatest of these is Love*. In the light of this conception, the noblest work that man can engage in to-day is the work of liberating the Christian Church from the thralldom and entanglement of dogma. The ministry of a Free Catholic Church will certainly be hard and exacting enough to challenge and fire the ideals of young men eager to give their lives to a really great cause. And to be lay-members of such a Church will involve the sacrifice and suffering of pioneers ; the willingness to lose for a while the inspiration of numbers and the support of visible multitudes, for their ideal can only be realised in its grandeur after much labour and the lapse of time. To such a difficult and glorious enterprise we may now commit ourselves,

while appealing to those who share our spirit to give up being idle spectators of our effort, and to "come over and help us." Timorous critics will, of course, endeavour to persuade us that a Free Catholic Church is impossible, "human nature being what it is." We reply that, on the contrary, it is the creed-bound Church that is ultimately impossible, "human nature being what it is." The dogmatic Churches have been well tried, and their failure to secure real unity was never more conspicuous than it is to-day. What we see is not a Pentecostal Unity of Spirit speaking convincingly to each one in his own language, but a Babel confusion of a hundred distracting creeds in open and frequently discreditable conflict. If human nature were other than what it is, if we could all think alike, and see Truth from the same angle of vision, then perhaps we might hope (were it worth while) for a Theological Church based on dogmatic agreement. But, human nature being what it is, we have to seek a Church based on a broader and a more humane

foundation. Recognising the diversity and uncertainty of human opinions, presuming no longer to excommunicate souls for honest mistakes and errors of intellectual judgment, we may form a Church whose faith shall be free from dogmatic articles, and whose religion shall find not a credal, but a poetic, imaginative, symbolic, and practical expression. Such a Church must be scrupulous in its truthfulness, fervent in its devotion, wide in its sympathies, rich and beautiful in the outward forms of its inner life, and, above all, strenuously ethical in its social activities. Its members will be bound together, not as subscribers to a theology, not as oracles of infallibility professing presumptuously to supply the world with a final statement of the mystery of the Godhead, but as humble seeking souls who feel the need and the benefit of a spiritual fellowship for praise and prayer, and for mutual encouragement in all high and pure living.

The Ideal is surely a commanding one ; the endeavour and the aim are distinctive, if not

in our own time new. We appeal to devout souls to leave their wordy strifes and unite in the Catholic Christianity of Christ. We will try to show that there need be no lost good, that all the best of the past may be focussed in the present, that we may share in the deepest pieties of history and experience afresh in our lives a new revival of faith.

In such a Free Catholic Church obsolete theologies will, naturally and without violence, pass away ; but the Religion of the Spirit will abide eternally young. And if that which passeth away was with glory, much more that which remaineth is in glory. God is not dead or dumb that He should speak no more. Our day of Pentecost is to-day, to-morrow, and always. The Spirit still breathes into the minds of men, and tongues as of fire may still kindle their thoughts and inflame their hearts ; and in the midst of all the stubborn difficulties of the actual and the visible, there remains for us who see the larger vision an allegiance and a fidelity to that Ideal and Invisible Church wherein all souls are one.

Probably there never was a time when the amount of beliefs held by an average educated person, undemonstrated and unverified by himself, was greater than it is now. But it is no less true—and it much concerns us here to note—that men are more and more disposed only to accept authority of a peculiar kind: the authority, namely, that is formed and maintained by the unconstrained agreement of individual experts, each of whom is believed to be seeking truth with unfettered independence and declaring what he has found with perfect openness and the greatest attainable precision. This authority, therefore, is conceived as the authority of the living mind of humanity, and as containing within itself, by the very nature of its composition, adequate guarantees for the elimination of error by continual self-questioning and self-criticism; it is not an authority—such as that of our Supreme Court of Appeal was once held to be—that refuses to question its own past decisions; on the contrary, it encourages to the utmost any well-reasoned criticism of the most fundamental among them.

HENRY SIDGWICK.

CHAPTER IV

THE IMPORTANCE OF DOCTRINE¹

THE realities of religion, though they often belong to that sphere of mystery "which passeth all understanding," are yet not nebulous aspirations too vague and colourless to give *any* kind of intellectual account of themselves. We may say with the mystic, "If I had a God whom I could understand, I would never hold him to be God," and yet cultivate intellectual seriousness, striving, as far as may be, to give a reason for the faith that is in us. Theology must be distinguished from Religion, but they cannot be completely separated, still less can doctrine be treated as a matter of no importance. That religion is ultimately indefinable is no reason why we should not try to give the

¹ Considerable portions of this chapter appear in an Essay on "Dogma or Doctrine?" published in a volume bearing that title.

utmost possible intellectual coherence to our devotional life. If some men are to-day restive under other people's plump dogmatism, there are many who find their own agnosticism intolerable, and in their determination to secure "something definite and positive," accept once more the old but now unhallowed superstitions. It is a paradox more true than any truism that agnosticism is the prolific mother of dogma. And as the churches are far more agnostic than is commonly avowed or realised, it is not surprising if a reaction has already begun in favour of authoritative standards of belief. There is going on to-day in the newspaper press, as well as in more permanent literature, a busy and persistent effort to restore dogma to its former power and prestige. In so far as this is a protest against unnecessary vagueness, we may welcome it, but in so far as it is the old impotence rushing to a delusive promise of strength, it is full of danger. Ecclesiastics who have no faith in a free religion, and who still seek to bind the word

of God, speak as if all moral principles and all clear truths rested on dogma, as if the very term dogma meant only a body of strong and ultimate convictions. This is a curious confusion of ideas. Precise truths, clear convictions may easily be distinguished from fixed artificial creeds, and zeal for a consistent doctrine must, as we shall presently show, be distinguished from zeal for compulsory dogma.

It was said in the third chapter that one of the distinctive features of a Free Catholic Church is that it renounces the futile effort to base its life on dogma. It recognises that "The religious union of men may be left to the natural play of spiritual affinities and the mutual understanding of affection and character, and for the common life of devout and humane duty, it is quite superfluous to think out its processes and grounds into defined speculative form. The more you keep the pious union waiting for the right theory, the more certain is the theory to go wrong, and the more fantastic become

the lines of aberration ; for, till the common life has been led, and its inward experiences gained, the very materials are out of reach which thought has to mould into truth.”¹ But given this free fellowship of the spirit, it does not follow that its members must be indifferent to theology. It is the duty of every one to seek clear intellectual convictions, and these will be vital and sacred. No thinking man can remain permanently without doctrine of some sort, without some working beliefs about Religion and Morality. That doctrine may be out of sight, hidden like the skeleton of a living body by the bloom and beauty of warm flesh and blood, and need on no account be obtruded on the vision like scaffolding round an ancient abbey. If we have any religious ideals at all, we must naturally reflect upon them, think about them, and, as we love mental consistency, systematise them. But here a distinction must be made between the collective function of the Church and the individual

¹ Martineau's *Essays*, vol. ii. p. 511.

function of particular members. A Free Catholic Church in its corporate character cannot adopt dogmatic formulæ, but the several members will seek their own individual interpretation of life. And as each will seek with the help of all in an atmosphere of frank encouragement and free criticism, a considerable consensus of opinion will naturally ensue, as in the case of natural science. *Such consensus, being unconstrained, will be far more trustworthy, and will ultimately carry far greater weight than any ordinary ecclesiastical dogma.* It is therefore important to grasp the fact that although the Church cannot impose an authoritative theology on its members, and although no member, or group of members, can impose an authoritative theology on the congregation, yet the eternal majesty and intrinsic authority of Truth as such will speak to all in the language of their own understanding, and *command their absolute obedience.*

Religiously and ecclesiastically we must, in order to organise at all and be a Church,

adopt the corporate and collective principle of union. Theologically, however, it will be our distinctive feature that we are unfettered and free, and, in that sense, individualistic. The necessity for this has been lucidly and convincingly stated on the Protestant side by Dr Hermann in the last edition of his *Communion of the Christian with God*. "The doctrine which really springs from faith has necessarily an infinite variety of forms. The Christian seeks to express in it the reality amid which his faith lives. But since that reality is infinite, therefore the doctrine in which one Christian seeks to express what his faith sees cannot be laid down as the limit for other believers. Different men see differently, and, therefore, since they ought to be truthful, they must express themselves differently. All attempts at union through uniformity of a compendium of doctrine, large or small, are futile, even when men succeed in building up such a structure as outlasts a millennium." ¹

¹ 2nd English Edition, p. 11.

And this brings us to the distinction between dogma and doctrine, terms often confused even by careful writers. Dr McTaggart opens his stimulating and challenging book on *Some Dogmas of Religion* with the sentence, "By metaphysics I mean the systematic study of the ultimate nature of reality, and by dogma I mean any proposition which has a metaphysical significance." As examples of Dogma he gives, "There is a God" and "There is no God," and he defines as religious dogmas "Those whose acceptance or rejection by any person would alter his religious position." This use of the word dogma, if it became universal, would have the advantage of philosophical precision,—although it would, in the meantime, cause much confusion and misunderstanding. It may, moreover, be questioned whether it would at any time be well to speak, as Dr McTaggart's definition would permit us, of undogmatic dogmas and of dogmatic uncertainties.

Auguste Sabatier, in his *Outlines of a*
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Philosophy of Religion,¹ gives the more usual, and, it would appear, more acceptable definition: "Dogma is a doctrine *of which the Church has made a law*." When, however, he attempts to establish his somewhat astonishing statement that "One cannot conceive either dogma without a Church, or a Church without dogma," he does not always keep doctrine and dogma apart, and, as a consequence, his treatment becomes ambiguous and equivocal. Dogma is not doctrine merely, it is doctrine *authoritatively decreed* by some society or Church. It is the element of official and external imposition that carries doctrine over into dogma. The very word signifies a command, an order, a decree. In the second chapter of Luke we read, "Now it came to pass in those days there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus." The Greek word here translated decree is *δόγμα* (dogma). It implies, then, an external official authority claiming and compelling obedience. To

¹ English trans., p. 230.

disobey or deny a dogma thus becomes *heresy* in orthodox theology, just as the violation of a statute may become a crime in law. It is the element of compulsion overriding the reason and conscience of man, and suppressing the right and duty of individual judgment, that degrades a Church from a voluntary fellowship of the spirit into a legislative and judicial authority.

An analogy from the world of science may bring this out more clearly. Science prides itself on freedom from dogma, but it is never so foolish as to pride itself on freedom from doctrine.

The doctrine of evolution, for instance, is universally accepted by scientific men, but it is not a dogma. Any man is at liberty to test and verify the facts afresh ; various interpretations may be put upon them, so that Darwin and Wallace, Spencer and Weismann, do not speak exactly the same thing. Now suppose that in order to put an end to all discussion and difference, the British Association passed a resolution : "Such and such

is the doctrine of evolution which, if any member do not believe, he shall be and is hereby excommunicated from our fellowship." Here is introduced the element of artificial authority and external compulsion, and what was a scientific doctrine has now become a scientific dogma.

It was, of course, a perfectly legitimate and necessary thing for the theologians of the early centuries to teach certain "orthodox" doctrines that seemed to them true. But when they converted these doctrines into dogmas, when the Councils of the Church declared these doctrines binding and authoritative, and all opposing doctrines false and heretical, and proceeded to persecute accordingly, they tried to put insufferable limitations on the search for truth. They attempted to nail down the needle of the theological compass instead of letting it swing freely to the pole of truth, and the consequence has been not unity, but discord. Is it not extraordinarily significant that while the liberty of science has resulted in a practical unanimity of opinion, the despotism of dogma has be-

gotten schism, hundreds of creed-bound sects in mutual antagonism? It is safe to predict that if theological agreement is ever to be attained, it can only be in the fresh and invigorating air of religious liberty. And if living and effective "authority" is ever again to be exercised by any Church, it will be, not by the Roman Catholic but by the Free Catholic Church. After admitting that the Roman Church has "acted despotically" and been guilty of "crude condemnation," Mr W. J. Williams goes on to say that, "She fell into that arbitrary and mechanical mode of regarding tradition which allows no time for originality to mature, and thus refused to recognise that liberty in the individual which is logically necessary to her own position, because her tradition itself is dependent on the reason and on the free acceptance of fallible men."¹

He argues, moreover, that it is not true of Pascal and Newman that they "deny the power of man's reason to attain to unity, except through the means of coercion and authority,"²

¹ *Newman*, etc., p. 179.

² p. 160.

and he speaks of "coercion" and "repression" as "weakening the argument derived from an intrinsic and voluntary unity."¹ There seems, then, no reason in the nature of things why, *given absolute freedom of thought*, theologians should not ultimately arrive at almost as great, and in the best sense authoritative, a consensus of opinion as the men of science. It is doubtless the case that the subject matter of *physical* science admits of the truth of its doctrines being more readily tested by "observation and experiment." The religious experiences of men are too delicate and subtle to be dealt with in the same way and in the same spirit. They are not, however, entirely beyond the reach of "observation and experiment," as the more recent works on the Philosophy and Psychology of Religion abundantly prove. How far the present tendency to deal "scientifically" with such phenomena of the religious life as conversion and such critical periods of religious development as adolescence may go we cannot say. But treatment of this kind opens up many fascinating

¹ p. 197.

and fruitful lines of study, which, it may be hoped, will in the long run secure some broad general agreement of results. If this came about in a scientific way by the unifying energy of Truth, such results would legitimately exercise over the non-specialist precisely the same kind of "authority" as a consensus of experts now exercises in the scientific world.

Liberate the Church from dogma, and the popular distrust of the theologian would gradually disappear. Men would recognise that theological agreement was no longer a make-believe in the interests of a fettered Church, but a genuine agreement honestly arrived at by each theologian pursuing his inquiry in an atmosphere of perfect freedom and without special inducements to come to prejudged conclusions. Like other men of science, theologians would be working subject to constant mutual criticism, and with continuous power to readjust their conclusions in accordance with their further examination of the undistorted facts of the inner and outer life. Natural science won her amazing victories through freedom of thought, through

Truth overcoming prejudice and superstition, through reasonable doctrine overcoming dogma. Liberal Theology will win her victories by exactly the same process. We can never do away with doctrine, nor is it desirable that we should, but we can do away with dogma, with authoritative ecclesiastical decrees, and so grow and evolve into ever fuller freedom and more perfect Truth. No hatred of dogma should make us impatient of doctrine, no zeal for definite doctrine should make us tolerant of dogma. Religion, acknowledged to be ultimately indefinable, would then be regarded as no disembodied ghost, but as a spirit of life clothed upon with firm flesh and sinews, and strengthened by the "dry bones" of reasoned, carefully articulated thought. In its final significance, knowledge is more than an intellectual account or explanation of life; it is itself part, and an important part, of life. Similarly doctrine, in its ultimate meaning, is more than a mere interpretation of Religion, it becomes itself an organic and constituent element of the Religious Life.

And not only would a Church thus liberated become a more effective and authoritative teacher of *true theology* than any dogmatic Church, it would also become a far more stimulating and inspiring teacher of *right conduct*. It will be readily admitted that no organised community can call for assent to false dogmas without ultimately forfeiting the respect of all truth-loving minds and of mortally damaging its own intellectual integrity and influence. Similarly no Church can to-day maintain its claims to obedience in matters of conduct except in so far as its ideals of conduct succeed in eliciting the unfeigned response and reverence of the conscience of its members. By pressing its demands beyond this point it must end in establishing a new Judaism and in usurping the temporal and secular functions of the State. Granted that the State ought to be increasingly moralised by the constant pressure and influence of the Church, yet the Church must not be secularised by adopting the disciplinary and punitive methods of the State's criminal code. The effort to secure the

practice of virtue by threats and punishments will ever defeat the Church's own moral ends, for obedience given on such terms is not a voluntary obedience ethically endorsed by the human conscience. It is not, in the strict sense, a *moral obedience* at all, but a *non-moral submission* exacted by fear and compulsion. A man who prudently abstains from crime simply because he knows he may be detected and punished by the State is already a criminal at heart. And the Church can only moralise and civilise such a man by touching the nerve of his motives and quickening his heart—that is, by awakening his active reverence for that Moral Ideal and Divine Spirit *whose service is perfect freedom*. A member who obeys the Church on any other than moral and spiritual grounds does but submit, and *obeys* not at all. He is, in fact, already self-excommunicated from her highest fellowship, though he may still nominally remain within her pale. And he whom a dogmatic and disciplinary Church excommunicates for obedience to an emerging ideal not expressed in her standards is,

spite of all her anathemas, more truly within the fold of God than that Church herself. It follows, therefore, from the very nature of the case, that no Church can rightly call for more than a *reasonable* and *moral* obedience. No other kind of "obedience" can even be invited except at the cost of abandoning the voluntary and spiritual character of the Church, and so striking at her very life.

The age of dogma, then, must pass away, and the age of doctrinal reconstruction hailed as already at hand. In the work of reconstruction it is the duty and privilege of members of a Free Catholic Church to be pioneers. It is an essential part of their vocation to restore Christian Theology into her rightful place among the hierarchy of Free Sciences. Let them hearten each other with those ringing words of Milton : "Though all the winds of doctrine were let loose to play upon the earth, so truth be in the field, we do injuriously to mis-doubt her strength. Let her and falsehood grapple, who ever knew truth put to the worse, in a free and open encounter."

Let the new faith then seize upon ritual, upon music and art, upon the method, in fact, of the majority and the common folk ; for its days in the wilderness are done, and it is entering upon its ministry. And if it would be like its Master, let it speak, ... in coloured, parabolic, stimulating ways, using the natural sensuous impulses for its own purposes, appealing, without fear for itself, to those sources of delight—colour, music, ordered speech, and magnificent action—which are “in widest commonalty spread.” Entreat the emerging instinct to trust itself, ... appeal to the young especially, ... to spend time, love, craft, and money in the attempt to make *beautiful* what they believe ; to insist upon working it out into tangible, symbolic form, so that it may win the hearts of men, as the art of Angelico still wins them from the walls of San Marco.

MRS HUMPHRY WARD.

That the faculty of forming new symbols is to-day so weak finds its explanation partly in the fact that it has been enslaved by dogmatism, and partly that dogmatic criticism has developed analysis and doubt at the cost of free and positive production.

HARALD HÖFFDING.

CHAPTER V

THE NEED OF SYMBOLISM

A SYMBOL was originally used by the Greeks to denote the two halves of the tablet they divided between themselves as a pledge of hospitality. The word gradually received an extension of meaning until it came to denote the suggestion of the invisible by the visible. In its modern sense it has been defined as a representation which does not aim at being a reproduction.¹

Secular life is rich in symbolism and ritual. When one of His Majesty's Judges holds an assize, he appears in judicial robes and ermine, and is attended by High Sheriff, Chaplain, Marshal, trumpeters and javelin men. The Under-Sheriff carries a wand of office. Bar-

¹ *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, by Arthur Symons, p. 4.

risters wear wigs, gowns, and bands. The Court rises on the entrance of the Judge, who represents the King and the majesty of law. Similarly a Mayor has his special "vestments" and chain of office, and his entrance is heralded by an official bearing the civic mace. A legal deed is executed by ritual. After writing his name, the signer touches a seal in the presence of a witness and recites aloud, "I deliver this as my act and deed." Copy-hold land is usually surrendered through symbol, a stick, a piece of turf, it may be, according to the custom of the manor. Friendly societies and the Freemasons have their own high ceremonial and "mystic" garments. The soldier salutes the Flag as the symbol of his Fatherland, and in the public offices of some countries appears a portrait of the reigning monarch, who is through this symbol saluted as though he were personally present.

It is not necessary to labour the point, for we cannot bow to an acquaintance, or shake hands with a friend, without "ritual." The

symbolism may appear appropriate or absurd, trivial or dignified, but in some form it is indispensable to human society. "It is in and through symbols," wrote Carlyle, "that man consciously or unconsciously lives, works, and has his being. Those ages, moreover, are accounted the noblest which can best recognise symbolic worth and prize it the highest. For is not a symbol ever, to him who has eyes for it, some dimmer or clearer recognition of the Godlike?" And speaking earlier in the same chapter, and with reference to religion, he says: "In the symbol proper . . . there is ever more or less distinctly and directly some embodiment and revelation of the Infinite; the Infinite is made to blend itself with the Finite, to stand visible, and, as it were, attainable there."¹

Symbolism must tend to become more frankly artistic in proportion as it ceases to be arbitrary, traditional, and heraldic. Here, as in other respects, it will be found that the Tractarians made Oxford the home of lost

¹ *Sartor Resartus*, Book III., ch. iii.

causes and impossible loyalties. It is highly significant that many of them had poetic gifts and artistic temperaments, but the best of their leaders do not appear to have deliberately and consciously attempted to introduce an artistic and intrinsically effective symbolism. They lived too exclusively in retrospect, and their chief aim was not to create, but to copy. They did not desire so much to discover a more beautiful form of worship as to mimic the antique customs and "uses" of mediæval Catholicism. The main intention of their symbolism was not to give expression to Beauty as such, or as a Divine Reality, but rather to perform miracles of sacerdotal power and teach the ancient dogma once more through visible gestures and living hieroglyphics. That a particular sign might be ridiculous rather than sublime would, by a courageous and consistent Tractarian, be felt as no reason at all for its discontinuance, if its use were sufficiently authenticated by correct ecclesiastical tradition.

It may therefore be justly said that if to-

day some of this ritual appears beautiful, it is so rather by happy accident than conscious design. Probably nothing could be more insulting to a true Tractarian than the charge that he advocated symbolism for æsthetic reasons, and that his ecclesiastical reforms were undertaken in response to the appeal of Art. But though *his* thought was—as probably he would admit and even urge—on dogma and tradition and sacerdotal efficacy, the popular mind—“simple, sensuous, impassioned”—tended to ignore all dogmatic subtleties, and fixed rather on the artistic and devotional element in the ritual. The stateliness and dignity of the order moved educated, no less than uneducated, people ; little children were charmed by the colour and brightness of the scenes they witnessed, and became fond of going to church ; sensitive and emotional temperaments were stirred by the suggestion of mystery and antiquity. The popular instinct was abundantly right, and from this point of view the High Church movement has justified itself as a genuine

contribution to public worship. For Religion needs the ministry of Art no less than Art needs the ministry of Religion. St Augustine, when, in the thirty-fourth chapter of the tenth book of the *Confessions*, he is exposing with vehemence the dangers of mere material loveliness, suddenly breaks forth into praise : "But I, my God and my Beauty, do hence also sing a hymn to Thee, and do sacrifice praise to Him who sanctifieth me, *because* those beautiful things which are conveyed through the souls of men to the hands of artists come from that Beauty which is above our souls, for which my soul doth sigh by day and night." And when we have pondered all the warnings of anchorite and Puritan, we still feel it is better to nourish our souls through the ministry of "whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely," even if it needs must be at some moral risk, than to starve and stunt our manhood's life by fleeing from Art into the deserts of asceticism. It must be admitted that the obligation of the Church of the past

to Art is quite beyond telling, for it is Art, Art consecrated by Religion, that has given us, among other gifts, the music of the sanctuary, the poetry of hymns, the dignity and stately rhythm of liturgies, the jewelled splendour of stained glass, the glories of painting and statuary, the sublimity and irresistible grandeur of ecclesiastical architecture. And the obligation of the Church of the future to Art will not be less but more marked. The failure of dogma to secure real unity of spirit will compel the Church to abandon the futility of the old credal method, and instead of seeking to express its ideas through the letter of philosophical exactitude, it will have a frank recourse to the beauty of symbol, the solemnity of devout silence, the emotional power of serious music, and the eloquence of inspired speech. Only thus can it express the great unifying experiences of the soul and in increasing measure avoid the sundering distinctions of ecclesiastical dogma.

“Poetry,” said Tennyson, “is like shot-

silk, with many glancing colours—every reader must find his own interpretation according to his ability and according to his sympathy.” And it is the glory of all high symbolism that, unlike dogma, it may speak a language of quite infinite suggestiveness, in that its meaning varies with the varying depth and richness and power of assimilation of each responding soul. It is thus peculiarly fitted for the expression of the realities of religion. “It cannot be denied that a religious community might possibly come into existence whose faith found poetic and symbolic expression, free from all dogmatic conclusions. There might conceivably be a common symbolism, or men might unite round great experiences of life, common to them all.”¹ That one and the same devotional expression or symbol is rich and powerful enough to dispense different gifts to different men, according to their needs and capacities, is to be accounted a strength, not a weakness.

¹ *Philosophy of Religion*, by Harald Höffding (English trans.), p. 253.

If it can also give wings to the soul to ascend to a common exaltation of divine communion, it can do all we can expect any such outward and visible agency to do, for this is to unite spirits in God.

A Free Catholic Church will accordingly use in its public worship, not words of dogmatic precision, but the figurative language of devotional utterance. Its liturgy will not be designed to define opinion like a creed, but to express desires and aspirations like a prayer. Its forms will be, not the codes and terms of mere belief, not the articles of association of an ecclesiastical joint-stock company, but more in the nature of poetry, the lyrical outburst of souls through the medium of a beautiful and imaginative literature. The obligations of a scrupulous veracity must, of course, attach to hymn and prayer, to chant and anthem. But having finally rid ourselves of creeds, we shall not test our language by merely literal standards. The intent of a creed is to secure theological exactness and the method is lawyer-like

accuracy. It must therefore be judged by honourable and veracious men according to its avowed aim and object, which is to define, in terms as precise as the intellect of man can make them, what is the true and what is the false theology. The attempt to evade the damnatory meaning of the Athanasian Creed by interpreting it as a devotional chant is as grotesque and violent a proceeding as would be the attempt to turn the Aliens Act into a cycle of patriotic sonnets. Hymn and prayer, chant and anthem are, on the contrary, intended for devotional purposes, and their fitness and truth must be judged in a devotional spirit and with due regard to their special character. They must indeed be truthful, and a great deal more than truthful, but they must be valued less as literal and intellectual statements of theology, and more as poetic and symbolic expressions of the religious spirit. The imperative of veracity applies always, for a picture or a poem may be insincere no less than the prospectus of a business, but the

canons of judgment will vary with the subject matter. It is easy to conceive of some forms of expression, legitimate and truthful in hymn and prayer, which would be quite false and indefensible in a creed. As poetic and symbolic figures of speech, understood and intended as such, they might serve to express and evoke the spirit of praise, communion, and prayer ; as phrases in a creed, understood and intended as exact intellectual statements, they might prove to be the deadly letter that killeth—false formulæ of theology and metaphysics.

A Free Catholic Church will naturally select symbols that devotionally unite, not creeds that theologically separate. Such a perfect devotional form as the Lord's Prayer would, on theological analysis, be found to mean different things for different minds. But this, from a purely religious point of view, may be what constitutes its excellence. At the Parliament of Religions in America, some years ago, there was no *Lord's Creed* which men could agree to recite, but there

was a *Lord's Prayer* which was said by Quaker and Ritualist, by Jew and Gentile. In the same way, all Christians, Trinitarian and Unitarian, can use the beautiful words of the Pauline Benediction, and pray for the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. They would intellectually interpret these words in different ways ; but it would be a calamity of liturgical impoverishment if, therefore, they had to give up speaking them. To consent to a common devotional use of such a form would not convict them of any indifference to theological truth. It would but prove that it is possible for the purposes of public worship to discover, without the slightest intellectual compromise, a devotional language that unites and not divides these disciples of the same Master. St Paul, who wrote the words, was certainly as far removed in thought from the modern representatives of these different theologies as these are from each other.

A similar principle holds good in the

case of symbols that are not literary. An example which Protestants may consider extreme is aptly furnished by Oliver Wendell Holmes. Few things in English literature are more human than his account, in the *Professor at the Breakfast Table*, of the death of "Little Boston"—a deformed man of fiercely uncompromising views. Of this account we can only quote what is immediately relevant to our subject.

As he lay dying he gave a lady that watched at his bedside a key, and pointed to a carved cabinet. "Open it, he said, and light the lamp. The young girl walked to the cabinet and unlocked the door. A deep recess appeared, lined with black velvet, against which stood in white relief an ivory crucifix. A silver lamp hung over it. She lighted the lamp and came back to the bedside. The dying man fixed his eyes upon the figure of the dying Saviour. Give me your hand, he said, and she placed her right hand in his left. So they remained, until presently his eyes lost their meaning, though

they still remained vacantly fixed upon the white image."

Oliver Wendell Holmes tells us that "Bridget, the housemaid, always insisted that he died a Catholic. She had seen the crucifix, and believed that he prayed on his knees before it. The last circumstance is very probably true; indeed, there was a spot worn on the carpet just before this cabinet which might be thus accounted for. Why he, whose whole life was a crucifixion, should not love to look on that divine image of blameless suffering, I cannot see; on the contrary, it seems to me the most natural thing in the world that he should. But there are those who want to make private property of everything, and can't make up their minds that people who don't think as they do should claim any interest in that infinite compassion expressed in the central figure of the Christendom which includes us all."

The comment is eminently just and sensible. To that crippled martyr of pain the crucifix was, as it might be to anyone, the symbol of fellowship in suffering and

sacrifice, the visible expression of the healing anguish of love. There may or may not be sufficient reasons, historical and practical, why Protestant communities should not use the crucifix in public worship, but in itself it, like the cross, belongs to Christendom, and should be regarded as common to Roman and Protestant. That is to say, *if* it could be guarded from superstitious usage and freed from identification with particular dogmas, it would prove a symbol that unites and not divides. In so far as it succeeded in doing this, it would, according to the principles here advanced, be a good and not a bad symbol. History and custom cannot, however, be disregarded, and they may conclusively forbid to less liberal theologians what appeared so natural and seemly to such a consistent Unitarian as Oliver Wendell Holmes. But the reference may serve to illustrate the inclusiveness of symbolism, and to indicate the spirit in which a Catholicism that is neither Greek nor Roman nor Anglican, but simply Christian and free, might seek to express its life. It ought to avoid

merely vague, colourless, impotent forms on the one hand ; it ought also to avoid hard, literal, dogmatic forms on the other. It ought to overcome the tendency that has all but overwhelmed popular Protestantism—of becoming external in its terror of externals, formal in its dread of forms, and superstitious in its fear of superstition. It cannot proceed to invent merely artistic symbols *in vacuo* with shallow disregard for the sanctions of antiquity, “though, to be sure” (to repeat Mr Lowes Dickinson’s remark), “rituals must have had a beginning.” On the other hand, it will be free to select, modify, re-adapt, and even create, in accordance with those modern needs and tastes which are themselves rooted in the past and largely controlled by it. Whatever forms it uses must be rich in the variety and quality of their suggestion, and impressively effective in bringing different minds and moods into vital spiritual harmony. Such symbolism would powerfully serve the cause of veracity in religion. For until we can offer men the possibility of a rich symbolic worship, it is natural that all except

the elect few, in whom Truth is a fierce and paramount passion, will remain wedded to beautiful traditional forms, however overlaid with mythology and credulity. The intellects of men may be convinced, and the heart and motive power of character remain almost untouched. To ask of these that they should sacrifice Love and Beauty on the altar of Truth is to invite the retort that they prefer to sacrifice Truth on the altar of Love and Beauty. This is doubtless, having regard to the issues at stake, a guilty and an evil choice. But it is not sufficient to say, as someone has aptly put it, that "A drowning sailor does not regard the artistic colour of the lifeboat that rescues him, nor does the soldier criticise the musical tones of the trumpet which summons him to battle." For the important truth to grasp is that all worshippers cannot regard themselves either as sailors to be saved, or even as soldiers summoned to battle. Religion, even among the sects, is not wholly shipwreck and warfare. It is the abiding satisfaction of normal needs, the eternal solace of recurring

sorrows, the utterance of daily prayers, and the enduring expression of life's holiest joy.

It must therefore have regard to the whole spirit of man in his complexity, and appeal to all his highest faculties, so as to elicit the response of his complete and entire manhood. And this it cannot do without assistance from Art, which is itself, at its greatest, one of the chief functions of Religion. If this is the case, then the church building, however simple and unpretentious, must be beautiful ; the order of worship, however unelaborate, must be reverent and full of quiet dignity ; the liturgy must appeal to things venerable as well as to future ideals, and the silence must be a "silence of Eternity, interpreted by love."

The best gift of the Society of Friends to public worship, apart from the beautiful sincerity of their lives, is their discovery of the power of silence. Every order of public worship ought to provide a time to be quiet, when all is at rest, and every heart may be still and find itself at peace with its God. It is at such moments that men best realise

that the presence of the Spirit in their deepest experiences is always and for ever ineffable.

If all the leaves of the trees of the wood were living tongues, they could not tell forth what God is in all His wonder, and power, and glory. And when we are filled by the Holy Spirit, and employ all the faculties of genius, and all the arts and the crafts of the children of men, to express what we feel and purpose and believe and know, when art and eloquence and literature have brought their gifts to the altar, we shall say, not how lovely we have made the tabernacles of God, but how poor is man to utter the unutterable, how weak is our praise, how unheroic our conduct, how cold our speech, and how unimpassioned our song. Yet we must offer, not our despair, but our "utmost for the Highest," and believe that God will graciously accept all our sincere efforts, and that men will rejoice to feel that the silence of even a visible and material Temple may vibrate with tidings of Eternal things told to the hearts of men.

The Church, as at first constituted, presents interesting and beautiful aspects. It was not a forced and arbitrary, but free, spontaneous union. It grew out of the principles and feelings of human nature. Our nature is social. We cannot live alone. We cannot shut up any great feeling in our hearts. We seek for others to partake it with us. The full soul finds at once relief and strength in sympathy. This is especially true in religion, the most social of all our sentiments, the only universal bond on earth. In this law of our nature the Christian Church had its origin. . . . They "were of one heart and of one soul." They could not be kept asunder. . . . In their mutual love they could not withhold from one another their possessions, but had all things in common. *Blessed unity! a type of that oneness and harmony which a purer Christianity is to spread through all nations.*

CHANNING.

CHAPTER VI

THE HIGHER CHURCHMANSHIP

IF religion has to do with the greatest of all of life's realities, then religious fellowship, the organism or the organisation which is formed by that religion, should be a matter of quite supreme interest and solemn concern. As there is a lower and a higher patriotism, so there is a lower and a higher churchmanship. To be completely destitute of the feeling of true churchmanship is to lack the human sense of membership, of mutual dependence and trust. It is to be insulated against the current and flow of a larger than personal sympathy, to be devoid of the feeling of being buoyed up on a volume of common life, of being sustained by the vitalising air of a world immeasurably broader than our poor individuality.

A nation that lacked the spirit of a noble patriotism commanding personal bravery and sacrifice would crumble into ruins in a few generations, and a religious fellowship that lacked the spirit of a loyal churchmanship sanctifying human solidarity and calling forth our personal service and homage would speedily disappear in the ecclesiastical struggle for existence.

Any religious attitude or theory which tends to relax permanently the bonds of fidelity to a Church life, which treats trivially of the high obligations and sacred privileges of Church membership, must therefore stand self-condemned. The ultimate basis of every enduring society is communion, brotherhood, and fellowship. If that communion is greatly conceived, deeply felt, spiritually realised, it becomes at once a *religious* communion, of which the central meaning and final fact is God. There can, indeed, be no true and lasting religion without churchmanship, without the consciousness of being members of a sacred fellowship.

William Morris, in the *Dream of John Ball*, says, in his strong and manly way :
“ Brothers, fellowship is heaven and lack of fellowship is hell, fellowship is life and lack of fellowship is death, and the deeds that ye do upon the earth, it is for fellowship’s sake that ye do them he who doeth well in fellowship, and because of fellowship, shall not fail though he seem to fail to-day, but in days hereafter shall he and his work yet be alive, and men be holpen by them to strive again and yet again.”

When we speak frivolously of our common membership, when we regard it in a secular spirit, when we think of the body of all faithful people as a mere aggregation of separate individuals, and not as a holy organism vitalised by one universal and Catholic life, when we are without care or concern for one another, without friendship, brotherhood, comradeship, and the readiness to suffer gladly for one another, then what we are pleased to call “our Church” is living without fellowship, and

“fellowship is heaven and lack of fellowship is hell.”

The first condition of true churchmanship is that we shall look in a great and ideal way upon the religious communion. It is to think of it always in its spiritual aspects, with something of the imagination of a poet and the holy ardour of a saint. Unworthy as we, its individual members, must be, we may yet learn to regard the spiritual organism to which we belong as essentially a glorious and heavenly reality. It is not a thing of a day or of a century ; it bears in its bosom the prayers and struggles, the songs and sorrows of the ages that have made it what it is. It looks forward with prophetic anticipation to a transfigured life, when the Lord shall have turned its mortal captivity into immortality. Not to have a high ideal of the Church is to be blind to the most exalted vision of Humanity. It is surely possible to have a poetic and spiritual conception of Human Society no less than of Nature. This conception of Humanity

culminates for the devout in the idea of the Church, Catholic and Universal. Poet and philosopher have both recognised that our present life is lived in a world woven of "appearance and reality." The Universe of Space and Time is for them the symbol of a still deeper substance. Through the everlasting flux of things they have glimpses of the Eternal. In the midst of successive phenomena they apprehend a surpassing Life, which—

"Superior and incapable of change,
Nor touched by witherings of passion, is,
And hath the name of God."

Nature murmuring with a thousand oracular tongues tells of a mystery beyond and swings for ever the golden censer of morning and evening sacrifice to a Being infinitely greater than herself. But great and divine as Nature is, there is also greatness and divinity in Man, in Human Society, the crowning glory of all her works. The old Hebrew poet considers the heavens, and, crushed into insignificance by the vastness of his

world, asks : "What is man that thou art mindful of *him* ?" But instantly recovering himself, he adds : "Thou hast made him but little lower than God (Elohim)."

We may reject the philosophy of Comte, and yet feel that there was a fine soundness in the instinct that could turn to Humanity as the *Grand Être*, the supremely worshipful reality. For whatever our Theology, we may confess that no man hath seen God at any time but this only begotten Son—Humanity—ever living in the bosom of the Father, this hath revealed him.

"We ought to do what the Dukhobors do," wrote Tolstoy, "bow to the ground before each man, remembering that God is in him." A spiritual view of man will beget a spiritual view of human society, and a spiritual view of human society will not stop short of seeing Humanity consummated not merely as a secular state, but as a spiritual organism, as the *sacred* company of all faithful people, as the Holy Catholic Church. In the meantime this is felt to have roots in

the visible and historic Church. "Highest of all symbols," says Carlyle, "are those wherein the artist or poet has risen into prophet, and all men can recognise a present God and worship the same. I mean religious symbols. Various enough have been such religious symbols, what we call Religions ; as men stood in this stage of culture or the other, and could worse or better body-forth the God-like. . . . If thou ask to what height man has carried it in this manner, look on our divinest symbol, on Jesus of Nazareth, and his life and his biography, and what followed therefrom. Higher has the human thought not yet reached ; this is Christianity and Christendom, a symbol of quite perennial, infinite character, whose significance will ever demand to be anew inquired into, and anew made manifest."

And this Christianity lives on, and we with it. When we think of its inner life, we think too of all the agonies and exultations that have gone to rear its fabric ; we think of the long succession of its triumphs

and tragedies, the roll of its heroic personalities, the calendar of its saints, known and unknown, that form a ruby chain of loving hearts touched to radiance by the light of Holiness. When we stand tremblingly conscious of the life of the Church, we must feel that it bears with it the very breathing of the awe of God, and the real presence of the Holy Spirit. All the ancient communities are present and about us ; they are no longer dead, but alive for evermore in God, and God is here. We are one of an innumerable and invisible multitude, and all the Churches of Christ salute us. When we come into the fellowship of the Church, we are not come unto a mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, or unto blackness and darkness and tempest, and a sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, but we are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the City of the Living God, and to innumerable hosts of angels, to the general assembly and Church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, to the spirits of just

men made perfect, and to God, the Judge of all.

And this Ideal Catholic Church sheds light and glory on the smallest gathering of sincere worshippers in the meanest of wayside Bethels. When we have stood in some of the great Italian cathedrals like St Mark's, Venice, or those of Florence and Milan, and seen "the height, the space, the gloom, the glory," and heard the chanting and the "immemorial calling unto prayer,"—have we not realised, Protestants though we be, that the Roman Church is, spite of all its superstition and immobility, a glorious branch of the Church Universal?

When we have stood in our own English cathedrals like Winchester, or old minsters like York, and heard again the ancient burden and refrain of the human soul rising and echoing through all the columned aisles, and dying away in the roof, like spirits hastening to some fairer world, have we not felt, Nonconformists though we be, that the Anglican Church, though her creeds be

obsolete, and, in their exclusiveness, cruel, is another glorious branch of the Christian Church ?

And when we stand in our own little sanctuary, wherever it may be, shall we say how feeble, how insignificant ? By no means, for we have this peculiar and inestimable advantage, that while the great exclusive Churches are by the terms of their communion compelled *to exclude us* from their devotional sympathies, we, by virtue of our Free Catholicism, are able *to include them*. As worshippers we have not to evade a creed or a legal trust before we can feel ourselves one with other worshippers and fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God.

When we let our thoughts dwell on the inspiring idea of the Church Universal, we are not constrained to put a check upon our imagination, or chill the ardour of our hearts, or narrow down our outlook to the limits of an ecclesiastical dogma. But how can a Roman or an Anglican or a trust-bound

Nonconformist cordially enfold within his charity the men and women whom his creed constrains him to curse? No member of a dogmatic and excommunicatory fellowship can possibly, without violating the articles of his faith, rise to such a comprehensive conception of Christendom as may be the habitual home of a Free Catholic. In the stated hours of public worship his thoughts may dwell glowingly on the union of all souls; and the proud recital of anathemas by men of close communions, however pathetic as a spectacle of human frailty, cannot mar for him the deeper undertone of unity.

It was Martineau who sang this great pæan of Catholicity. "It is a glorious thing to call up, while we worship, the wide image of Christendom. . . . Turn your thoughts away from the noisy discord of sects, believe nothing of their mutual slanders, forgive the occasional weakness of superstition, and be not angry with the narrow vision of earnest conviction, that can see

nothing but its own truth, and far beneath the superficial divisions created by the intellect, see, in the Sabbath spectacle of the world, evidence of a deep and widespread union of hearts. . . . In how many tongues, by what various voices, with what measureless intensity of love is the name of Christ breathed forth to-day ! What cries of penitence, what accents of trust, what complaints of earnest desire, pass away to God ! What an awful array of faces that gaze forth into immortality with various looks of terror or of love ! The vows and prayers whose millions crowd the gates of mercy no recording Angel could tell, but only the infinite memory of God. Of how glorious a Church, then, are we members when we kneel within this place ! in how solemn an act do we take our part ! with how sublime a brotherhood do we own our fellowship ! ”

In the atmosphere of this wider churchmanship we can feel neither littleness nor isolation.

The great battalions of Rome, the mighty

cohorts of "orthodoxy," have greatness and glory enough, but greater and more glorious far, *because more truly Catholic*,¹ is the company of the faithful, whose sufficiency is not of numbers or of creed, who have strength and sincerity to stand firm in the face of indifference and contempt, and for the sake of honour, veracity, and a more Christian comprehension, suffer patiently to be despised and rejected. In the heart of the least of such companies the voice of Christ still whispers, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. Blessed are ye when men shall reproach you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake—rejoice and be exceeding glad, so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."

No power on earth can prevent our sharing in the deepest life of the Holy Catholic

¹ "Romanism is anything but what it boasts to be, the Universal Church. I am too much a Catholic to enlist under its banner."—CHANNING.

Church and in the communion of saints ; and if we are faithful "to truth, to liberty, to religion," then whatever may be the attitude of present-day communities, we may confidently encourage ourselves with the thought that the companies of the past, knowing with a deeper wisdom, loving with a wider charity, and understanding with a profounder insight, look out from their invisible battlements and cheer us on, and will receive us at the last with shoutings and with joy.

"Do not tell me," said Channing, in a passage that ought to be classical, "that I surrender myself to a fiction of imagination, when I say that distant Christians, that all Christians and myself, form one body, one Church, just as far as a common love and piety possess our hearts. Nothing is more real than this spiritual union. There *is* one grand all-comprehending Church ; and if I am a Christian, I belong to it, and no man can shut me out of it. You may exclude me from your Roman Church, your Episcopal Church, and your Calvinistic Church,

on account of supposed defects in my creed or my sect, and I am content to be excluded. But I will not be severed from the great body of Christ. Who shall sunder me from such men as Fénelon and Pascal and Borromeo, from Archbishop Leighton, Jeremy Taylor, and John Howard? Who can rupture the spiritual bond between these men and myself? Do I not hold them dear? Does not their spirit, flowing out through their writings and lives, penetrate my soul? Are they not a portion of my being? Am I not a different man from what I should have been, had not these and other like spirits acted on mine? And is it in the power of synod, or conclave, or of all the ecclesiastical combinations on earth, to part me from them? I am bound to them by thought and affection; and can these be suppressed by the bull of a pope or the excommunication of a council? The soul breaks scornfully these barriers, these webs of spiders, and joins itself to the great and good; and if it possess their spirit, will the great and good, living or dead, cast it

off because it has not enrolled itself in this or another sect? A pure mind is free of the universe. It belongs to the Church, the family of the pure, in all worlds. Virtue is no local thing. It is not honourable because born in this community or that, but for its own independent, everlasting beauty. This is the bond of the Universal Church. No man can be excommunicated from it but by himself, by the death of goodness in his own breast. All sentences of exclusion are vain, if he do not dissolve the tie of purity which binds him to all holy souls."

Having this ideal bond, members of the broader fellowship will be possessed by the inspiring consciousness that the hosts of heaven are on their side, and that they have the living authority of God in their strivings to realise this ideal and establish on earth a visible Free Catholic Church. They will not decry or denounce other religious bodies, for they will have purged themselves of every taint of sectarianism. But as they are true to themselves, they must believe in the

excellence of their own faith. Gladstone once said that "Each man must believe his own religion to be greatest."¹ This is obviously true, for our religion could not be a religion at all if we did not believe it to be (at least for us) the best. But we need not therefore despise what we must in sincerity regard as lower forms of religion; we may be content simply and charitably to cherish our own, but loyally and devotedly as the purest and the noblest. Every member of a religious fellowship should therefore challenge himself with the question—"Is the visible Church to which I belong the best and truest of all the alternative Churches that here and now appeal for my allegiance? In my heart of hearts and before God, does it represent the most ideal and most divine Catholicity, is it the Church that more vitally *and truthfully* than any other chooses and claims me?" If he must answer, No, then in the name of sincerity and religion he must enter into that other fellowship that

¹ Morley's *Life of Gladstone*, ii. 137.

speaks a holier and more sacred invitation to his heart and mind. But if he answer, "Yes, spite of all its imperfections and unpopularity, and of my own unworthiness, this is, taking everything into consideration, the Church of my soul's strongest affinities," then he must ask himself the further question—"Am I doing all I ought to do to show forth my sense of the profound privilege of belonging to such a Church? Do I sufficiently magnify the meaning of my membership in such a body-corporate, do I feel as I ought. the gratitude, the responsibility, the call to fidelity, which my position here makes upon me?"

The sincere answer in word and in deed to such a self-examining conscience would beget the higher churchmanship for which this little book is a plea. No other fellowship could then mean for us quite so intensely what this Free Catholic Church means. Her services of devotion would be among the greatest experiences of the soul; our Church life would well up in every member as a

pure and exalted emotion ; God would meet us face to face, spirit to spirit, life to life. It cannot be thought for a moment that because God is not miraculously present in a visible wafer reserved in a jewelled tabernacle on the altar, therefore He cannot be in our Church at all. There also, not less but more vividly than in St Peter's in Rome, is the real presence of the Spirit, and the group of communities forming a Free Catholic Church will be more holy, more truly "authoritative" and divine for us than any other ecclesiastical order on earth. True churchmanship would urge us to learn more about kindred Churches, and about the Liberal Christian movement here and on the Continent and beyond the seas. We should no longer feel forlorn and isolated, we should have spiritual comradeship with all, and an affectionate intimacy with "brethren of one mind with us" bravely bearing victorious witness over the whole world. The Free Catholic Church would appeal to our imagination and greatly inspire us, we should feel our common kin-

ship connecting us with an irresistible current of life into one body, and we should realise the essential glory of the Church to which we belong.

And this Church will be an organ of justice and mercy to rebuke the greed and cruelty of Modern Society. Being constitutionally democratic, she will make the cause of the people her own cause ; seeing the multitudes she will be moved with compassion and seek to live like the Son of Man, to minister and not to be ministered unto. And to practical charities will be added the intellectual work of an enlightened and progressive faith that will have no part or lot in the ecclesiastical "crucifixion of thought."

If the religious world needs most of all fire and enthusiasm, it needs also reason and sweetness and light. Men, even when they seem most indifferent, are longing for the gospel of the diviner Christ and the humaner God which such a Church could bring to all terrified or sterile hearts. Let it be ours, then, to stand serenely yet resolutely strong ;

brave, yet humble and undefiant ; unyielding in principle, yet charitable ; honest and uncompromising, yet magnanimous ; alone if need be, yet not alone, for the Father is with us. The day will come when, if not we, then others, shall see what our hearts have dreamed.

Feb 22, 1908

